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**Sadistic Scopophilia in Contemporary Rape Culture: I Spit on Your Grave
(2010) and the Practice of ‘Media Rape’**

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This article revisits earlier theorisations of cinematic voyeurism and gender-based violence in considering the cross-media connections between cinema and non-consensual pornography online. In particular, it looks at how the remake of a significant rape-revenge film, I Spit on Your Grave (1978/2010), explores the role of technology in the perpetuation of female victimisation. By making a visible connection between the female character's physical rape and the violation of her subjectivity performed through filming her without her consent, the film raises a larger social/media issue, which I call media rape. In offering a theorisation of this phenomenon, the article analyses the operation of the website Creepshots.com, which distributes non-consensual photos of women. The comparison between these two texts promotes an understanding of the visual and discursive continuities between cinema and online spaces in relation to media rape and rape culture more generally. At a time when the distinction between the creators of and audiences for media content is less straightforward within the context of online media, sadistic scopophilia needs to be reconsidered in relation to medium specificity. Although it is already problematic in the cinematic context, when it extends to online media sadistic scopophilia becomes a human rights violation.

Keywords: media rape, film, sadistic scopophilia, misogyny, rape-revenge

Introduction

On its release in the autumn of 2010 the remake of the notorious rape-revenge film *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978) reignited the critical controversy inspired by its predecessor (Carol Clover 1992, 114--116; Martin Barker 1984). In narrative terms the two films are virtually identical. Jennifer Hills (Camille Keaton, 1978/Sarah Butler, 2010) retreats to the countryside to write a novel, where she encounters a group of local young men who rape her repeatedly and then leave her for dead. After surviving this excessively violent attack, she avenges herself by killing all the men involved - and both films end with a close-up of Jennifer smiling contentedly. There is a crucial difference, however, in the way the remake updates the original text by including a diegetic video camera as a further instrument of Jennifer's violation, since one of the men, Stanley (Daniel Franzese), not only participates in her rape but also records the incident. Jennifer's physical rape is thus preceded by and continued through her 'media rape', a term used here to signify the exploitative use of various media technologies and platforms (photography, cinema, online media, etc.) to perform (mostly) women's victimisation. The concept encompasses diverse violent practices facilitated by technology, including cyber rape and forms of non-consensual pornography. Despite the apparent similarity of such practices, the term media rape designates a broader category of violation of individuals' self-determination. Such acts can be part of physical rape, and may thus perpetuate the victim's experience of the event *ad infinitum* (Judith Butler 2007; Alexa Dodge 2016). But even in cases when media and physical rape do not coincide, I argue that media rape directly affects the physical body – firstly, that of the woman whose privacy is violated and, secondly, with regard to women's behaviour and their relationship to their image and social conduct more generally. This understanding of media rape does not intend to trivialise the traumatic impact of physical rape on the lived body, but aims to suggest the underlying continuities in abusive attitudes and discourses within contemporary rape culture. Owing to the proliferation of platforms that encourage their users to publicly share

information about their private lives, this article engages in a cross-media consideration of gender as a crucial parameter regarding the right to privacy.

In exploring manifestations of media rape, this article will reconsider the role sadistic scopophilia plays in the commodification of women's violation. The inclusion of the diegetic camera in I Spit on Your Grave offers an ideal opportunity to analyse how sadistic scopophilia is inscribed as a key principle of both the film's narrative and its mobilizing of looking relations. Moreover, I will explore the visual and discursive continuities between the exercise of sadistic scopophilia within this particular film and online media rape practices, as exemplified by creepshots.com - a website dedicated to publishing photos of women's body parts taken in public without their knowledge. Women's online victimisation can take various forms, but creepshots clearly share a kinship with the kind of spectatorial voyeurism cinema offers – as does Stanley's decision to create a video record of Jennifer's violation. By exploring the connection between online media practices and spectatorial processes within a film (and a genre) that explicitly depicts and narrativises women's rape, I aim to demonstrate how “pre-existing cultural norms play a constitutive role in the way that hating gets expressed online” (Shepherd et al. 2015, 7). As women's victimisation is so fundamental to the unauthorised scopophilia of cinematic pleasure, it is hardly surprising that the affordances of ‘new’ technologies - and their increasing blurring of boundaries between online and offline life - have extended such ‘pleasures’ to other media that similarly seek an intimate bonding between the consumers of images and their objects.

A nuanced approach to media effects theories that acknowledges the “fundamental and intricate connections between representation and human attitudes” (Cynthia Carter and C. Kay Weaver 2003, 16) permeates the subsequent comparative analysis of the two texts. As I will suggest, the concept of media rape illuminates the intricate relations between technology, online and offline screen cultures, and misogyny as the sadistic scopic regime of cinema is transposed from the realm of the ‘imaginary signifier’ (Metz, 1975) to everyday reality. While the cinematic context channels, contains and controls sadistic scopophilic desire, it emerges

as an unquestionable act of sexual violation in the context of more active forms of media engagement. Butler argues that “the photograph neither tortures nor redeems, but it can be instrumentalized in radically different directions, depending on how it is discursively framed, and through what media presentation the matter of its reality is presented” (2007, 964). This observation applies equally to the moving image – indeed, the addition of motion to the parade of images only intensifies its representational force. Women’s victimisation is not, then, an ontological consequence of the image, moving or still, but I Spit on Your Grave and Creepshots.com both illustrate how media technologies can invest looking with gender discriminatory power imbalances and perverse modalities of pleasure. Such representational procedures reaffirm integral connections between the ‘imaginary’ and actual victimisation of women within contemporary rape culture.

Feminist Scholarship and Post-feminist Representations of Rape

Representations of gender violence have occupied feminist film scholars for several decades. From detecting a repeated sexist formulation in narrative film, and the sadistic pleasure it offers (Laura Mulvey 1975), to exploring specific treatments of rape on screen (Clover 1992; Jacinda Read 2000; Sarah Projansky 2001; Tanya Horeck 2004; Claire Henry 2014), feminists have repeatedly critiqued the cultural commodification of female victimization. A recurring issue has been the impact the onscreen depiction of rape may have on film spectators and its role in framing wider rape discourses. The post-millennium revival of the rape-revenge film testifies to its topicality, since “the identification of (and indeed the commercial decision to remake) an earlier film is located in particular extratextual, institutional or discursive practices” (Constantine Verevis 2006, 25). As well as being remade around the same time as two other 1970s rape-revenge films - The Last House on the Left (1972/2009) and Straw Dogs (1971/2011) - I Spit on Your Grave also kick-started a film series comprising two sequels, I Spit on Your Grave 2 (2013) and I Spit on Your Grave 3 (2015). These films exhibit a self-reflexive return to the genre from a neoconservative

perspective that incorporates a “postfeminist rather than feminist engagement with rape politics” (Henry 2014, 5).

As Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra have argued, postfeminist discourse simultaneously “involves an evident erasure of feminist politics from the popular, even as aspects of feminism seem to be incorporated within that culture” (2007, 5). By reworking elements that in the original film had a certain purchase on second wave feminism (Clover 1992, 114-165), I Spit on Your Grave (2010) exemplifies the political contradictions within postfeminist sensibility (Rosalind Gill 2007). According to Projansky, many cinematic depictions of sexual violence against women exhibit a recurring representational paradox, since they work “both to challenge rape myths from a feminist perspective and to contribute to the existence of violence against women in media culture” (2001, 96). Projansky highlights as another key characteristic of rape representations within post-feminism the degree of self-awareness revealed by such films as The Accused (1988), Bad Girls (1994) and Rob Roy (1995), which explicitly foreground the role of spectatorship. Within these films, she suggests, “the most vile villain” is usually “not the rapist but the man who watches the rape” and the voyeur’s eventual punishment could potentially work as “a powerful feminist critique of a ‘rape culture’ [...] that acknowledges the male gaze as sexually assaultive” (2001, 116).

This is not the case with the remake of I Spit on Your Grave, however, owing to the manner in which the film narrativises and renders the rape as spectacle, as well as through the disavowal of its own complicitous reliance on and commodification of sadistic scopophilia. The film’s post-feminist self-awareness further reinforces its political ambiguity through Jennifer’s ironic identification as an independent woman, and perhaps a contemporary feminist. It thus conforms to the revisionist standards of the new rape-revenge cycle, but unlike the other remakes and sequels it is also exceptional in the degree to which it engages directly with the concept of media rape. Through the ambiguous narrative and visual framing of Stanley’s video, and its dual role as sadistic entertainment and incriminating evidence, the film simultaneously questions, condemns yet also condones sadistic scopophilia. Key

moments in both the pre-rape and the rape sequences encourage the audience to adopt Stanley's position by sharing his point of view through the video camera. The film thus implicates the spectator in the action by creating an affinity with the voyeur/rapist, a recurring if intermittent alignment of the two looks that renders Jennifer's abuse as pure spectacle for the cinematic audience "tak[ing] the film into a no-man's-land outside its own time and space" (Mulvey 1975, 12). As Kate Harding observes, rape culture's "most devilish trick is to make the average, non-criminal person identify with the person accused, instead of the person reporting a crime" (2015, 3). The rendition of media and physical rape as spectacle and the temporary alignment of the film spectator with Stanley situate the film within a regressive, neo-conservative context of contemporary culture more generally and link it with other media rape practices such as creepshots. This article aims to supplement this ongoing feminist critique of the increasing obsession to control and 'discipline' women through the circulation and consumption of images of the female body and its violation. In doing so, I will proceed with the analysis of sadistic scopophilia as a constitutive element of media rape in the two different media texts.

Sadistic Scopophilia and 'Media Rape'

Sadistic scopophilia, a term invoking the psychoanalytic focus of 1970s film theory, combines together terms Mulvey uses - i.e. sadistic voyeurism and fetishistic scopophilia (1975) - to analyse classical Hollywood modalities of gendered visual pleasure.¹ As Freud (1915) explained, the sadistic aspect of voyeuristic pleasure relies on inscribing distance between the eye and the desired object, a procedure that is the very basis for cinematic scopophilia (see Christian Metz 1975 page number). As I will suggest, this sadistic regime of perceptual pleasure is perfected within online practices of media rape, as exemplified by digital platforms such as Creepshots.com. Like the members of the Creepshots.com community, Stanley exercises an active kind of pleasure in being able to record and display

his video of the unsuspecting Jennifer, which is the first instance of her violation, before the men actually invade her house.

The sadistic aspect of scopophilia is thus premised not only on the physical distance between onlooker and object, but on the emotional distance as well, which renders the object's willingness to be looked at unnecessary and even undesirable. Creepshots.com, a website launched in 2011 and dedicated to publishing "candid voyeur-type pictures of REAL people" (<http://creepshots.com>) exemplifies an understanding of "women's bodies being public property for enjoyment" (Anne Burns 2015, 110). According to the creators of the website "[i]f a person is posing or aware that a picture is being taken, then it is no longer a creepshot. A true creepshot captures the natural sexy, embarrassing or funny aspect of the subject matter/person without their knowledge" (creepshots.com). This demonstrates the fetishisation of sadistic scopophilia in media rape practices since securing the subject's consent is not just unnecessary but against the 'rules'. The required distance, both physical and psychological, or the disassociation between the voyeur and the object of their gaze is achieved in this context during all stages of production, distribution and consumption of the images. The lack of consent guarantees this distance and effects the desubjectification of the woman, giving the photographer, distributor and consumer of her image mastery over it and by extension over the woman herself.

The disassociation resulting from the lack of consent at the point of taking the picture or video may also be seen as inversely proportional to the physical proximity between the camera and the object. The CreepShots team instruct their members to get close-up shots suggesting that if they "are too scared or lazy to walk over and get a closer shot, then maybe creeping is not for [them]" (<http://creepshots.com/about/creepshot-tips/>). This proximity is not only beneficial for the viewer but can be thrilling for the photographer as well: "Creeping is very stressful but when you pull off a good one, its [sic] like blowing a huge load ... then taking a nap" (<http://creepshots.com/about/feedback/>). Besides the important lack of consent involved in 'capturing' such images up close, this erotic metaphor provides further validation

to the central role sadistic scopophilia plays in media rape scenarios. Satisfaction is further enhanced by sharing the photos/videos online and eliciting praise from the team and other users. The ability to record images in close proximity without being detected is a crucial factor in this context and relies on a set of conditions established by the ubiquity of appropriate technology. This consists of recording equipment, such as mobile phones that are hard to detect, and online digital environments that facilitate anonymity and disassociation between the offline and online identities of their members, since the CreepShots Team are not individually named and other members use aliases. In this context, technology does not facilitate the loss of the ego but a validation, a re-imagining of the voyeur's ego, which is achieved through identification with technology and its skillful use. The scopic regime of sadistic scopophilia is thus perfected.

Christian Metz states that “cinema's voyeurism must (of necessity) do without any clear mark of consent on the part of the object” (1986, 264) due to its physical absence. And yet through cinema's “institutionalization” the kind of “unauthorised scopophilia” Metz theorises has become an acceptable social practice. Cinema audiences are aware that at some point during the production of the film, even if that point is far removed from the moment of their viewing, the ‘objects’ have willingly entered into the cinematic contract of looking relations. So, in other words the consent lies not in any guarantee provided by the object's acknowledgment of the onlooker but by their complicity in creating this illusion of a reality that keeps the spectator outside the spectacle, a “pure onlooker whose participation is inconceivable” (Metz 1986, 264). Cinema as a whole --- with the exception of some films that deliberately break these conventions and address the audience --- is based on creating the illusion of non-consensual spectacle, but at the same time its institutionalisation breaks this illusion foregrounding the consensual involvement of actors being filmed. Two contradictory positions are thus created for the spectator: on the one hand they are placed into the privileged position of the unobserved observer who derives pleasure from the spectacle on the screen, and yet on the other hand they are completely powerless to affect the events on screen and can

only do so through adopting already prescribed positions within the fictional world presented to them (identification).

The illusory position of security and control bestowed upon the film spectator within the cinematic context is actually attained in everyday practices of media rape, since technology allows sadistic scopophilia to seep through from the imaginary to the real. This distinction points to the precarious medium specificity of consent in different configurations of looking relations. In cinema, the mere presence of the person photographed is a sign of their exhibitionism/willingness to be looked at and therefore sufficient consent for the guilt-free consumption of their image. A further complication of this is a perceived sadistic slippage between the pleasurable consumption and production of images, apparent in the confusion between the technical ability to photograph/record someone and the right to do so. The availability of cameras and other digital technologies is seen as 'permission' enough and any contract or agreement between all parties involved in a professional context (cinema, television, photography exhibitions, magazines, etc.) is considered unnecessary in everyday situations. Thus the voyeur's entitlement exercised passively over the object within the paradigm of institutionalised scopophilia, when transferred over to other forms of everyday media practice where it is unauthorised becomes an active violation of the object. In the context of creepshots there is a complete lack of consent at all stages of image production, distribution and consumption, facilitated by technology. The amateur photographer presumes as their right to photograph a woman's body both due to her physical presence and due to their ability to use undetectable recording equipment. This entitlement extends to the subsequent distribution of these images through the Internet, which allows for the infinite duplication and consumption of said images detached from the context of their production. Where the film spectator exercised an illusory sense of mastery over the object of their gaze, and was allowed to vicariously experience a sense of omnipotence under specific fully stratified conditions, prescribed by narrative, visual, as well as industrial frameworks, the new technologies give the voyeur full potency to fulfill sadistic scopophilia. It is this difference

between passive illusion and active practice that differentiates sadistic scopophilia in cinema from media rape.

I Spit on Your Grave (2010) provides an excellent opportunity to further understand the link between on-screen and off-screen practices of women's victimisation due to the self-reflexive engagement with sadistic scopophilia evident in the diegetic media rape scenario that closely resembles the creepshots practice. A crucial difference between I Spit on Your Grave and Creepshots.com is that while the former is a narratively organized genre film, the latter dispenses with narrative as a principle for organizing its vicarious pleasures. The creators of the website do, nonetheless, provide an overarching discursive framework that 'legitimizes' consumption of its images, which is developed further by the users' comments – as well as including some elliptical contextualizing 'narrative' information. One of the most crucial features of the CreepShots homepage is the declaration that only paying subscribers can access the full contents of the website. This serves both to signal the 'elite' status of its community of like-minded voyeurs and to underscore the commodification of media rape.² Introducing themselves as "a couple regular family guys who love to hang out, have a good time", the "CreepShots Team" declare that they launched their website so they could share their hobby with like-minded devotees (creepshots.com). These 'regular family guys' thus claim a 'normalised' identity that makes them relatable and destigmatizes their 'hobby'. Such normalisation is even more disturbing, however, as it underlines the entitlement of 'socially integrated' men to derive pleasure from the violation of women's rights to privacy and self-determination.

As administrators of this website, the CreepShots team have ultimate control of the way this practice is performed, presented and talked about. There are two separate sections giving technical and aesthetic tips to aspiring members about how to get 'good' creepshots, as well as informing them about their rights as photographers. The authority the Creepshots team exercise over the images and the women photographed is part of their online identity as connoisseurs and gatekeepers of this kind of voyeuristic pleasure, as well as experts on the

legal aspects of the practice. Similarly to the cinematic voyeur, they remain anonymous, and the Internet allows them to conceal their identity by substituting it with an alter ego that is in a hierarchical position of power over women and other male paying members of their website. Their use of gender pronouns to refer to the voyeur (male) and the object photographed/recorded (female) indicates the heteronormative phallocentrism the images are framed by. Unsurprisingly the website does not include a section on the rights of the women being photographed, which further desubjectifies them and dispossesses them of any rights to their image. Concerning women's reaction in discovering their picture on the website, they give two alternatives: either delight in and endorse the inclusion ex post-facto, or request the removal of their photo. Regarding the second scenario the website states the following:

If however, you wore something sexy, tight or revealing and are shocked, ashamed, belittled or embarrassed that you were creeped and posted on here, then contact us at the email above and include the link and description of the picture. Your request will be reviewed and if found legitimate, the picture will be removed. (<http://creepshots.com/about/>)

Thus their practice is presented as a form of flattery, assuming an exhibitionist tendency in all women. However, if a woman chooses to be offended instead, she is held accountable for presenting herself in a provocative fashion, essentially inviting this sexually predatory behaviour. Having established this, they further invest themselves with the power to scrutinize such requests and decide on their validity. The ironic twist on the post-feminist discourse of choice is therefore a mere illusion and a legalistic trick. This clearly demonstrates how the sadistic pleasure of media rape extends beyond the purely visual to the actual control of the women photographed through the handling of their images. The analysis of Jennifer's media rape, which bears striking similarities with Creepshots, will further clarify this continuation of abuse from the visual to the physical level.

Sadistic Scopophilia and Media Rape in I Spit on Your Grave (2010)

The introduction of the media rape scenario occurs ten minutes into the film when Jennifer, who had been sitting on the porch of her cabin, spills some wine on her clothes and goes in the kitchen to clean them up. The close-up on her hands scrubbing the wine stain in the kitchen sink is followed by a full shot of her from outside the window. A non-diegetic sound effect accentuates the transition to this point of view suggesting threat and danger. This shot is clearly marked as a video camera shot due to the interlacing on the image and the hand-held camera movement, which contrast with the quality of the image and the steadicam shooting up until this point. The video camera then zooms in on Jennifer's body from the back and briefly focuses on her backside for about ten seconds. There is a cut to another close-up of her hands and the point of view becomes untethered from the video camera, only to re-adopt it five seconds later, this time focusing on her face in profile. This lasts for another seven seconds and the previous sound effect is repeated before the image cuts to black. The inclusion of the ominous sound effects signals the threatening and intrusive character of this, as yet unidentified, voyeuristic gaze while distinctly framing its introduction. Withholding the voyeur's identity in this instance encourages the spectator to notice and question this intrusive gaze while building up the tension around Jennifer's future endangerment. Although the distinction between the textures of the two looks is clearly drawn, this co-habitation of looking relations creates the possibility for a self-reflexive questioning of the spectator's position in relation to the spectacle as a whole. Prior to this scene, the omniscient camera allowed spectators to gaze at Jennifer settling in her cabin, writing, sunbathing, and generally enjoying the 'privacy' of her retreat. The diegetic camera temporarily disturbs the viewer, linking them with the predatory presence of the, as yet unknown, diegetic voyeur. The key difference is that the spectator can feel secure in their cinematic voyeurism through the medium's institutionalisation. Moreover, the adoption of this point of view is fleeting and explicitly marked as sinister and therefore the spectator is quickly detached from it and allowed to return to a 'safe' viewing position.

The next video camera shot is approximately four minutes later, offering a close-up of a dead bird on the leaf-covered ground followed by the rapid movement of a baseball bat smashing the carcass. Through a succession of shots of a man's hand holding the video camera and recording the scene, the spectator recognizes the three men --- Andy (Rodney Eastman), Johnny (Jeff Branson) and Stanley --- from the earlier petrol station scene, which was their first encounter with Jennifer. The identity of the diegetic voyeur is thus revealed. Moreover the shot of the smashed pigeon creates an immediate association between the video camera gaze, sadistic scopophilia and physical violence. Interestingly Andy tells Stanley to turn off his camera and stop filming the pigeon carcass, fearing it will get them into trouble "with that human society". Upon hearing this Johnny laughs condescendingly and corrects him by saying that the right word to use is "humane". This sequence establishes the men's position being outside "human society", effectively 'othered' through their violent, inhumane way of passing their time. What is more interesting though is the link between the video camera gaze and death, which prefigures Jennifer's victimization.

Soon after this incident, Matthew, the fourth member of the group, arrives, at which point Stanley shows them his video of Jennifer. The shot of Stanley holding the camera while showing the video in the small screen is followed by a shot of the three men watching, with Johnny at the centre of the frame, followed by a cut to the video camera shot of Jennifer's backside as viewed earlier. This visual syntax draws the viewer in and 'reminds' them of their previous complicity with the illicit voyeuristic position, which once more creates a disturbing affinity with the diegetic voyeurs/rapists. On the one hand the film implicates the spectator with the action of the male gang, through the continuing inclusion of the video camera shots during which they adopt Stanley's viewing position. On the other hand, although this camera perspective is repeatedly adopted throughout the pre-rape and the rape scenes, the video camera shots are very brief, thus constituting a transient gaze that serves to only fragmentarily disturb the overall structure of the film's looking relations. Either way, the film effectively

conflates institutionalised, sadistic scopophilia with media rape and enables us to observe the slippage between the imaginary and actual violation of the woman on screen.

The film's narrative further illustrates the linear escalation of violence in Jennifer's rape, since the non-consensual video subsequently acquires additional abusive force once Stanley shares it with his friends. Following the exhibition of the video, there is a close-up of Johnny's stern face as he settles back in his chair, while the others express their admiration for Jennifer's physique. In the ensuing conversation, Johnny is clearly coded as being the Alpha male in this group and therefore any insinuation that Jennifer might prefer Matthew, who is presented as cognitively challenged, is an offence to his masculinity and a threat to the group's hierarchy. By "taming" Jennifer, he is determined to re-establish his shaken position as the Alpha male.³ If Stanley managed to steal a view of her in her underwear and Matthew earned a kiss for fixing her bathroom plumbing, he needs to accomplish more. Interestingly, in justifying his predatory inclination, he insinuates that the purpose of her retreat to the countryside was to have sex. He supports this assumption by saying: "Bitch like that, she come out here for one reason and one reason only. Titties flopping in the window like that for everyone to see. Come on, you know". Despite the obvious erratic logic of this assumption coated in offensive language, this clearly indicates the video's function in enabling the sadistic slippage regarding Johnny's perceived right over Jennifer's body. Deriving pleasure from the recording seems to serve as a gateway to further manipulate and abuse Jennifer's physical body. It seems inconsequential that within the diegesis Jennifer's half-naked body is not on display "for everyone to see", but Stanley by surreptitiously violating her privacy renders it so. Therefore the men's misogynist and violent attitudes demonstrated in this scene are expressed through and reinforced by Jennifer's media rape, which ultimately leads to her physical assault.

The gradual escalation of sadistic voyeuristic pleasure derived through media rape and culminating in physical abuse is also apparent in the inclusion of two variations of the look that occur subsequently. The first is when the three men invade Jennifer's cabin and start

terrorizing her while Stanley, who is recording the whole incident, asks her to “smile real pretty for the camera”. This is a clear example of violation of her right to self-determination since the men are trespassing and they continuously ignore her repeated demands to leave. Even if in the first instance of media rape, when she was unaware of being filmed, there was some possibility of her consent had she known, at this point the abuse has escalated to the degree where denial of consent is necessary for the men’s pleasure. This scene of terror and debasement lasts for approximately ten minutes and is interspersed with multiple shots from the video camera point of view. These shots focus primarily on Jennifer’s body and terrified face, underlining the incremental intensification of the spectacle of violence, both for the diegetic and the non-diegetic spectators. Once more the sadistic slippage between visual and physical abuse is made apparent. Only when the video camera, for a brief instant, is turned to the male voyeur, and the abusive gendered visual structure is disrupted, does Jennifer become temporarily empowered and manages to escape. The role of the diegetic camera as an instrument of sadistic control and violence is thus clearly established. However, the length of the scene draws attention to the dual contradictory effect of the diegetic camera. The intermittent adoption of its point of view puts the spectator in the position of the rapist/voyeur and the release or switch to the non-diegetic camera, alleviates the spectator’s viewing discomfort and potential guilt caused by this alignment. The two camera perspectives are thus differentiated, which results in disavowing to an extent the film’s complicity in sadistic scopophilia.

The second variation of looking relations occurs towards the end of the rape scene and it is the only instance when the spectator adopts Jennifer’s point of view. In order to participate more actively in the rape, Stanley has left the video camera on the ground and the film’s point of view once more becomes untethered from his gaze. At approximately forty eight minutes into the film, when the men continue taking turns to rape her, the camera adopts the victim’s point of view, which serves a dual function; it draws the spectator closer to her suffering, which until then they had been witnessing as a kind of spectacle punctuated by the

transient gaze of the diegetic voyeur/rapist, while creating a moment of suspense and empathy as Jennifer attempts to get hold of the sheriff's gun. Soon after she fails, the screen fades to black, an indication that Jennifer loses consciousness. As soon as she regains her senses, the camera alternates between close-ups of her face on the ground and shots from her point of view of the men around her. The inclusion of these point-of-view shots, through which we share her distorted visual and aural perspective, has the effect of briefly re-instating Jennifer's subjectivity, as she pulls herself up and staggers away. However, the empathetic relationship between Jennifer and the spectator is only temporary as her tormented and broken body is put on display and presented as abject. This return to the 'spectacularisation' of her body, which has been consumed to destruction, ultimately exemplifies the violence of both diegetic and non-diegetic sadistic scopophilia and its link to physical abuse (actual or projected) in the rape-revenge genre.

However, the danger of collapsing together institutionalised scopophilia, media and physical rape on a visual level is, to an extent, counterbalanced on the narrative level by maintaining a certain distance between the spectator and the diegetic voyeur/rapist. As mentioned previously, the men see themselves as being outside "that human society", and through their extremely violent behaviour they are unambiguously portrayed as sociopaths. For instance, in their conversation during the fishing scene, the men keep antagonizing each other, exchanging homosocial banter through which their status as 'white trash' is conveyed to the audience. Their language is poor and ungrammatical and they use numerous swear words. An important deviation from the original film is that they are coded as being Southern, which has an immediate resonance with stereotypes of the South being backward and conservative.⁴ Unlike the founders of CreepShots, who attempt to describe themselves and their hobby as normal and socially or legally acceptable, the fictional rapists are clearly presented as social outsiders by their own admission. This is further reinforced by the fact that none of them are seen to have a functional relationship apart from the sheriff. This presentation is in line with generic conventions according to which the rapists are stereotyped

and the representatives of the law are complicit in the victimisation. Admittedly, the film thus does not unproblematically encourage audience identification with the rapists, but at the same time it also avoids offering Jennifer as an ideal point of identification through her dubious portrayal during the scenes leading up to the rape.

Far too often does one hear comments about women inviting rape because of the way they are dressed or more generally because they seem to transgress traditional ideas of modesty and respectability in one way or another. This misogynist attitude can be detected more generally in contemporary rape culture that “encourages us to scrutinize victims’ stories for any evidence that they brought violence upon themselves” (Harding 2015, 3--4). I Spit on Your Grave (2010) perpetuates this interrogation of the victim and assumption of her culpability through a number of significant additions to the original film. In her first encounter with the men Jennifer appears as a confident and independent woman who sneers at Johnny’s crude flirtation. Her cynicism and self-reliance effectively bruise Johnny’s male ego, impelling him to ‘up’ his game in order to regain his Alpha male status. Injecting this first encounter with elements of antagonism, completely absent from the original, creates the first link in a disturbing cause and effect chain of events that supports the ‘asking for it’ argument. Despite its questionable value as justification, not having this excuse at all would be tantamount to absolving Jennifer of all responsibility and portraying the men as complete psychopaths. Instead, through this inclusion the film seems to suggest that to an extent Jennifer, by not keeping her head down and not realising her vulnerable position, enters into a power-play with the men and provokes them to ‘put her in her place’. This encounter therefore can be seen as complicating any empathetic relationship between Jennifer and the spectator since it sustains the assumption that if women behave more wisely they can avoid rape (Harding 2015, 5--6). The post-feminist tendency to play both sides of this issue and assign a certain amount of blame to both parties is thus seamlessly inscribed in the narrative from the beginning.

Following this initial set-up, a number of seemingly inconsequential shots are dotted around the pre-rape sequence, which amount to a body of evidence casting doubt on Jennifer's 'innocence'. In a number of shots following her arrival at the cabin, Jennifer is depicted drinking alcohol and consuming recreational drugs, i.e. marijuana. The accumulation of these images in the sequential narrative exposition that leads to her abuse enables the neo-conservative post-feminist discourse that seeks to "award the benefit of the doubt to the accused" (Harding 2015, 6). The addition of the local sheriff, who initially comes to Jennifer's rescue, after she manages to escape during the pre-rape scene, directly expresses this misogynist, victim-blaming attitude. Upon seeing the evidence of her drinking as well as lying about smoking marijuana, he dismisses her story and not only participates in the rape but becomes the group's ringleader. Thus the film represents and reproduces the discourse of contemporary rape culture, which asks women "to change [their] behavior, limit [their] movements, and take full responsibility for the prevention of sexual violence in society" (Harding 2015, 5). Spectators are given the opportunity to adopt a sanctimonious misogynist perspective and disassociate themselves from Jennifer, who makes a series of 'bad' choices, which, following this line of reasoning, may be attributed to a combination of arrogance and naivety.

The narrative's paradoxical relationship to rape culture, achieved through the inclusion of contradictory elements in Jennifer's portrayal, is further reinforced by its cathartic nature, a typical characteristic of the genre more generally. The symmetry of rape-revenge horror films makes viewing Jennifer's victimization more bearable due to the expectation of the revenge. In a sense the brutality of the rape functions as justification for the elaborate, ultra-violent revenge that Jennifer unleashes, and vice versa. The audience is therefore acquitted of any guilt in enjoying this violent spectacle and through the fetishisation of the female avenger --- in the remake Jennifer disappears into the river after her rape and she uncannily returns as an all-powerful avenging angel, whereas in the original film the revenge is presented as a more realistic culmination of her process of healing --- the trauma of

her prior victimisation can be put to rest. What is more, the function of the diegetic camera as well as the creepshot aesthetic are incorporated in the revenge demonstrating technology's neutrality, as it can be repurposed or to return to Butler's view "instrumentalized in radically different directions" (2007, 964). Not only does Jennifer take advantage of Johnny's lecherous gaze in order to knock him out and proceed with her revenge, but she also sets up the camera turning the screen towards Stanley, so that he can watch his own death while it is being recorded. Thus she manages to rehabilitate the use of technology, turning the voyeurs' sadistic scopophilia against them. Even though the film tries to contain misogynist actions and discourses within its self-sealed world, by providing a Manichaean resolution, its own visual investment in sadistic scopophilia is by no means confronted. By sacrificing the diegetic voyeur the film 'saves' the non-diegetic one.

Conclusion

Since the 1970s, in particular, feminist scholars have been critiquing the gender discrimination that is deeply ingrained within dominant structures of pleasurable looking in pictorial art, photography, cinema and other media (Claire Bonney, 1985; Griselda Pollock, 1988; Amelia Jones, 1998; Sandra Phillips 2010). While voyeurism and its sadistic objectification and victimization of women are by no means new phenomena, contemporary media practices have transformed the vicarious sadism of cinematic scopophilia into an active form of violation, which I have defined here as media rape. As I have suggested, the 2010 version of I Spit on Your Grave remobilizes the conventions of the rape-revenge film to engage explicitly with the issue of women's violation, and its depiction of Jennifer's media and physical rape clearly demonstrates this slippage between the vicarious and the actual participation in technologically mediated forms of abuse. Carol Clover observed (1992, 153, 165) that its 1978 predecessor exploited and appropriated contemporaneous feminist discourses to construct a politically ambiguous perspective on questions of women's violation and activism – and the same is true of the remake. The political equivocation of this film's

post-feminist sensibility (Gill 2007) allows for a potential critique of the act of watching rape while simultaneously reaffirming the “political terrorism” (Morgan 1980, 135) women are subjected to. The most distinctive (and most disturbing) feature of this version of I Spit on Your Grave, however, is the way it supplements the rape scenario of the earlier film with an emphasis on the participatory dynamic of mediated rape, and in the process enables a sadistic slippage between media and physical violation.

The incorporation of a fictional voyeur within I Spit on Your Grave (2010) invokes contemporary surveillance culture, and the increasing blurring of the boundaries between the private and the public self facilitated by contemporary technologies. The worldwide web and, in particular, online social media have intensified this process, as well as permitting new forms of interactive pornography that have amped up the perverse sadistic pleasure mechanisms of traditional sexualized looking. Creepshots.com exemplifies this new online pornographic culture of media rape, as its foundational principle is the very negation of consent. Trading in unauthorized looking, creepshots.com purveys a fantasy of sexual domination by proxy, via the furtive mastery of possessing the woman caught unawares. This denial of consent resembles Susan Herring’s identification of the rhetoric of harassment in online public spaces, which “invokes libertarian principles of freedom of expression, constructing women’s resistance as ‘censorship’”, which succeeds in establishing “the ideological dominance of (male-gendered) libertarian norms of interaction on the Internet” (1999, 152). This strategy extends beyond online spaces, however, since the law in some US states, such as Texas, protects the right to take ‘underskirt’ photographs under the First Amendment (Jenny Kutner 2014).

Perhaps the only technical difference between Stanley and the CreepShots team is that when Stanley films Jennifer through the window of her cabin, he is trespassing - a practice that the CreepShots team advise against, “because it violates her right to privacy” (creepshots.com). But this is mere legalistic camouflage for a system of sadistic scopophilia that is predicated on the very violation of women’s privacy. A forum such as creepshots.com

exists precisely to strip away women's right of ownership of their private selves and of their sexual selves, and of the right to object to their eroticized objectification. As such, it perfectly exemplifies the insidious power dynamics of the contemporary culture of media rape.

¹ Although Mulvey's work has received considerable criticism for its psychoanalytic focus resulting in the development of feminist film theory beyond her original formulations in "Visual Pleasures", my use of psychoanalytic terms in the context of media rape intends to acknowledge the continuous validity of some of these early observations for understanding the psychodynamic positions inscribed within film and other media texts. Gendered ways of looking within these products of Western patriarchal society are very much influenced by race and class factors, but it is beyond the scope of this article to address. In the analyses that follow I therefore limit myself in considering the different inflections of gender-based violence effected through the technological advances in contemporary screen culture while contributing to an update of screen theory.

² My access to the website has been restricted to its freely available content, but this is sufficient to discern how the creators and some users make sense of and promote their practice.

³ In her first encounter with Johnny, Jennifer effectively bruises his masculine ego by responding sarcastically to his attempt at flirting with her and embarrasses him in front of his friends.

⁴ In the original film Jennifer sets off from New York and travels to the nearby countryside in Connecticut. Clover (1992) analyses the representation of the city/country dichotomy that is also relevant here.

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